Reflections from Emptiness

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Dhamma Quotes on the Path to Liberation
by Venerable Ajahn Anan Akiñcano

www.watmarpjan.org

For permission to reprint for free distribution, contact:
marpjan@gmail.com
Wat Marp Jan,
Klaeng, Muang,
Rayong 21160
Thailand.

REFLECTIONS from emptiness

Dhamma Quotes on the Path to Liberation

VENERABLE AJAHN ANAN AKIÑCANO

There is no Bodhi-tree,

Nor stand of a mirror bright.

Since all is Void,

Where can the dust alight?

Dajian Huineng (638–713)

6th Chan Patriarch

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Translator's Introduction

"Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu—thank you, thank you so much," a beaming, middle-aged Sri Lankan woman exclaimed as she kneeled and touched her forehead to the floor; "Everything about the Dhamma seems so much clearer now—thank you once again." Behind the bowed figure, a line of over two hundred individuals filled the meditation center to capacity in Sydney's Chinatown. All waited to express their gratitude to the small, benevolent-looking monk in ocher robes who sat cross-legged on a slightly raised platform.

"Okay, okay, you're welcome," Ajahn Anan replied with a warm laugh in broken English. Although those gathered at the center that evening in April were of varying race, gender, age and nationality, all of their expressions of gratitude followed along the same lines: *Thank you for finally bringing the teachings to life.*

Before their meeting with Ajahn Anan, many shared a common problem: confusion about the path to liberation. Although these days there is abundant information about the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, and many monastics and lay people teaching it, one has to ask oneself, how many of them have actually attained liberation?

Ajahn Anan is renowned for getting right to the heart of every teaching and for possessing a true depth of wisdom not commonly found in the world. The reason the reflections in this book offer so much clarity and precision is because they come from a mind of pure Dhamma. These reflections aren't just memorized from a book or from another great teacher: they arise out of knowing, a knowing that deeply understands the truth of our existence. Out of the thousands who teach Buddhism today, very few possess a high level of knowledge and insight while being able to teach in a manner everyone can comprehend.

Although the teachings gathered in this collection reveal Ajahn Anan's ability to turn

profound subjects into easily understandable reflections, bringing his teachings to life in translation can sometimes prove difficult. For example, not long ago on a full-moon night, ten Westerners gathered together at Wat Marp Jan to have a Dhamma discussion with Ajahn Anan. As most of them spoke limited Thai, I was asked to translate.

The sounds of the forest enveloping the Uposatha Hall seemed to hush while Ajahn Anan sat on his wicker chair. Monks gathered around him on the floor in traditional roles—one giving him a foot massage, another fanning away mosquitoes, others sitting in meditation—all of them searching for the understanding he possessed. Eventually, one of the monks asked, "What is the true nature of the mind?"

Ajahn Anan became perfectly still, solid, like the enormous mountains behind him emanating a tranquil power. Time suspended. The monks could almost feel the answer in the silence permeating the night. After some moments, he said, "*Waang*."

In Thai, this means empty, free, or void. When he said it, the answer was perfect; however, to express the depth of this one word response in English seemed almost impossible. Even though I might translate precisely what he said, it cannot convey the power, insight and clarity as that single word in Thai spoken by the Ajahn.

Just like his single response on that full-moon night, Ajahn Anan continually throws gems of pure wisdom to those around him, gently coaxing and directing, as if to say, *here: take it; use it; practice it; understand it; become it*. Sometimes, you won't notice the significance of what he said—it may seem like an incidental remark in between hundreds of words heard throughout the day. Much more often though, after years of practice and contemplation, the depth of Ajahn Anan's wisdom becomes apparent to you bit by bit.

When you finally break through to the gravity of his words, you realize he has been teaching you all along and challenging your

mindfulness: *are you paying attention, did you pick it up?* Ajahn Anan just keeps tossing teachings to you, like a loving father who continues to lob a ball to his son who still hasn't learned to catch—day in, day out, hour upon hour, over and over, until the youngster learns how to catch and throw with proficiency. However, with the Dhamma, these lessons of wisdom span a lifetime. Not a day goes by at the monastery where Ajahn Anan isn't extending something important to you for consideration, patiently trying to teach you to catch.

The bulk of these teachings come from his book in Thai, *Akiñcanovāda, Unbounded Sayings*, which has been hugely successful in Thailand. After some discussion with Ajahn Anan, we decided to make the book accessible for Western audiences by changing the format and layout of the original publication. Many of his devoted disciples have worked together on this project, giving up much of their own time and energy in the hope that *Reflections from Emptiness* will help

bring clarity to practitioners who are experiencing confusion about the Dhamma and the path to enlightenment. I am greatly indebted to all the people who helped with the production of this book, and take sole responsibility for any errors contained within.

Although the teachings are deceptively short, you will find them profound. There's no need to rush through the book. Take some time, read them, contemplate them, and bring the wisdom into your practice. Like that loving father, Ajahn Anan has offered these teachings to you. Now it's up to you whether you take your eye off the ball and drop it, or firmly establish your mindfulness and grasp it with both hands, bringing it safely into your heart.

The Translator,

Wat Marp Jan,

Thailand, 2015

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa

Homage to the Blessed, Noble and Perfectly Enlightened One

REFLECTIONS on meditation

PRACTICE TO KNOW the natural state of all phenomena: to know life's natural state is to know it according to the truth. This, in essence, is seeing both mind and body as impermanent, suffering and not-self. Everything you have experienced since birth is inherently suffering, and these experiences have become buried deep within your psyche: sickness in the body, sadness in the mind, longing, hoping for things and not getting them, becoming separated from things you love—all of these experiences constitute suffering. You have to see through and penetrate the truth of suffering, to recognize and understand it. Once you have recognized it, the next step is finding a way out of it.

THE PATH TOWARDS happiness starts with giving. It transforms your ingrained desire to hoard material possessions into an attitude of trying to give up your sense of selfishness. Then you develop morality, which brings a level of calm and ease into the mind. As you progress further on the path of the Dhamma and start to practice meditation, an even deeper level of stillness and tranquility arises in the mind and you will be able to see the truth of all existence by developing the highest pinnacle of Buddhism: the ability to let go.

Never give your heart over to outer things, because when those things change, you'll suffer. Give your heart over to something that doesn't change and cause suffering: give it to the Dhamma.

The aim of every element of the practice you undertake is to make the mind calm.

When asked how to gain continual results in the practice, Ajahn Anan answered, "You have to become experienced in the art of doing—neither over-doing it, nor under-doing it, but doing just the right amount and doing it continuously."

Practice meditation, but do it for the right reason: for the complete destruction of suffering.

Sickness simply arises and ceases. Suffering simply arises and ceases. Happiness simply arises and ceases. Good and bad simply arise and cease. Even though these are ultimate truths, you still have to try as hard as you can to develop goodness and abandon immorality.

Strive in your search to make the Dhamma the foundation of your life, and at the same time, patiently endure.

If the mind succumbs and gets lost in the world it becomes darker and darker, but if the mind inclines towards the Dhamma it becomes brighter and brighter.

A new day, a new night, or even a new year—none of these have the ability to make the mind new along with them. If there's delusion present, the mind actually becomes older and more decrepit. However, if the mind is developed in wholesome qualities, has a sense of giving, and is intent on doing good deeds, it becomes brighter and newer all the time.

Faith is the power of belief and conviction. When you have faith, you'll be diligent and put forth effort in meditation. As a result of that effort, mindfulness will naturally follow. In turn, mindfulness will cause calm and peace to arise within the mind. When the mind is calm, wisdom will grow, and with wisdom in the mind, faith will become stronger. Meditation practice revolves back and forth like this.

From the combined effort you put forth daily, monthly, and yearly, the mind will eventually become calm. When it becomes calm, there will be no more struggling with procrastination because the mind develops a power unto itself. Effort then becomes an automatic process.

YOU NEED EFFORT to take action and effort to let go.

YOU HAVE TO give up everything if you want true calm in the mind. However, even when calm is attained, keeping it is difficult. For example, to keep a mirror spotless, you have to polish it continuously to stop the build-up of dust and grime. Looking after calm in the mind is the same; however when the practice gets to the level where you deeply comprehend mind and matter as not-self, there's no need to look after the mirror anymore, because you know that even the mirror is not-self.

THE ONLY THING worth learning is how to have mindfulness in the present moment.

A TIBETAN BHIKSHUNI who had many questions about meditation in the Thai Forest tradition came to Wat Marp Jan for a week. Ajahn Anan showed her an extended welcome by answering all her questions in great detail. On a few occasions, he tried to encompass what he was teaching simply and directly for her by saying, "You don't need to study a lot and know all this information; when you keep your mindfulness consistently with a meditation object, that's enough knowledge gained. Watch over the mind to see the wholesome and unwholesome states that arise and try to find *the one who knows* within yourself."

SOMETIMES YOU THINK good thoughts, sometimes bad. Sometimes the mind is calm, sometimes it isn't. Sometimes you have wisdom, sometimes none. The mind has its own natural tendencies, so never attach to it—simply know it as it is.

IT IS WHEN mental defilements[1] overcome you and become too hard to fight off that you must rely on patient endurance.

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[1] Unwholesome qualities that obscure the purity of the mind. See Glossary.

"In meditation," says Ajahn Anan, "when good states arise we become happy and experience pleasure. When bad states arise, we experience aversion and displeasure." He frequently advises practitioners experiencing these difficulties to contemplate in these ways: "Look at these states from the perspective of unsatisfactoriness—they're inherently suffering. Alternatively, contemplate from the perspective that these states aren't certain—they're impermanent. Lastly, contemplate that there is no inherent self to be found within these states. Whichever aspect you see it from, you will be able to let these states go. If the mind truly comprehends suffering, it will no longer create attachment to *me* and *mine* and will completely abandon the sense of self. This is the arising of true wisdom."

Endure suffering in the present, and the result will eventually be happiness. Indulge in pleasure in the present, and experience suffering as its result.

You want a calm mind? Well, you have to work for it by meditating. It's the same as someone who wants to be rich: they have to put in the work because money won't just magically appear.

If you don't think your Dhamma practice is at the level it should be, instead of feeling disappointed, be even more intent to make the most you can of this life.

If you neglect to put forth effort, wisdom won't arise. If wisdom doesn't arise, all that one experiences will be suffering. Never be negligent. Continually put forth effort to develop wisdom.

Whether you're certain or uncertain, both states are unsure.

Keep reminding yourself, *my practice still isn't complete, true Dhamma hasn't arisen within the heart yet. There is still more to do.* Constantly reflect on where you are in the practice.

If you really want true happiness, then train the mind to understand all the feelings and emotions it experiences.

Whenever you are meditating on a particular Dhamma theme, if it fails to make the mind peaceful and at ease, there's something wrong in your approach.

You have to always be reprimanding yourself. When others reprimand you, listen to what they have to say, especially if what they say is in line with the Dhamma—then it's really worth listening to.

It isn't too hard to teach others. Teaching yourself is a lot harder.

While at war, an army needs a fortress, soldiers and guards to keep protected from the enemy. When you practice the Dhamma, you need morality as your fortress, being watched over by the guard of diligent mindfulness. When attraction attacks the mind, capture it, and then let go. When aversion attacks, capture it, and then let go. Keep the guard of mindfulness on continuous duty. Avoid getting entangled in feelings and emotions that assail you by knowing that they are one thing and the mind another.

If you're able to make the mind deeply calm, you'll have no questions or doubts about what Dhamma theme to investigate: you'll instinctively know for yourself.

Whenever you experience praise, happiness, gain, or fame, consider it as simply a natural part of your existence as a human. Similarly, whenever you experience blame, suffering, loss, or disgrace, look on it as just a normal part of your existence.

If you only accept things that please you, you'll have trouble when you experience anything unpleasant.

The amount of old negative kamma (*Sanskrit: karma*) you have stored up is already a burden, but you keep acquiring new kamma all the time, continuously building on top of the old without realizing that you have enough already.

Someone who had a lot of troubles came to tell all their problems to Ajahn Anan. After the Ajahn listened to the grievances, he said: "The more you keep your mind with *Buddho*,[2] the calmer it becomes, and the more your problems disappear."

There are many Dhamma teachings out there, but the essence of them all is morality, concentration and wisdom.

[2] A traditional epithet for the Buddha. Used as a meditation word in the Thai Forest Tradition. See Glossary.

THE MOST REDUNDANT recurring themes stressed by Ajahn Anan in the daily development of meditation are as follows: Firstly, he encourages, "Whatever posture you are in —sitting, standing, walking or lying down— have mindfulness on your meditation object at every moment." Secondly, the Ajahn urges: "Eat just enough; know moderation in all aspects of life; be respectful and humble; learn to give up selfishness."

If the factors of the Eightfold Path are strong, the defilements will retreat further and further away from you. However, if the factors are weak, they quickly move back in.

"If the defilements are in the mind," a practitioner asked, "Why do we have to investigate the body?"

Ajahn Anan answered: "It's true that the defilements and fundamental ignorance are within the mind, but the mind is attached to the body."

Ajahn Anan frequently relates a question he asked Ajahn Chah as the main turning point in his practice. At the time, Ajahn Anan was starting to gain deep calm in the mind for long periods and wanted to ask Ajahn Chah what to do next. He felt that investigating the body was too coarse to be the fastest way to enlightenment and that investigating the mind must be the correct method.

When he asked Ajahn Chah about this, the teacher responded, “You’re asking me this, but right now is your mind calm?”

Ajahn Anan recalled the experience: “In those days, asking Ajahn Chah about your practice was a huge deal. I was petrified and shaking like a leaf, so more out of fear than anything, I replied that my mind was calm. He told me—and made it more than clear—that if the mind is calm, you have to investigate the body. For me to assume my practice was beyond that point at the time

was foolish. I was like a little kid who wants the biggest, juiciest mango on the tree, but the stick I was using to get it was too long and heavy for the job."

Ajahn Anan continued: "The key lesson every meditator should take away from this is that when the mind is calm, use that calm to investigate the body as impermanent, suffering, and not-self. This is because the roots of all defilements are attached to this body."

"You can go straight to investigating the mind and see the Dhamma," said Ajahn Anan, "if you already have a lot of accumulated merit and your practice is very advanced. For example, when the Buddha investigated the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, thought and consciousness—he broke through ignorance and attained Dhamma. You have to remember though, the Buddha already had a lot of accumulated merit and his practice had progressed to the final point.

Because of this, he was able to contemplate dependent origination and become enlightened—but normal people like us? Even the great Thai Forest masters like Ajahn Mun[3] and Ajahn Chah practiced investigating the body first, and taught others to do the same."

[3] Ajahn Mun (1870–1949): Considered to have revived the Thai Forest tradition. Teacher to Ajahn Chah and many other forest meditation masters.

THE CORRECT PATH has already been laid out for you. The only thing remaining is to practice it as much as possible.

FOR MOST PEOPLE, observing the body and mind is hard, but for me, the real difficulty is giving you enough faith to follow the path of practice with your whole heart. Keep striving. Every one of you—keep striving.

REFLECTIONS on dukkha

Dukkha means a state unable to endure. Even though on the surface some things may not seem to inherently have dukkha, in actuality they do. For example, inanimate objects with no life—rocks, mountains, etc.—although they're around for a long time, they don't endure forever. At some point, they eventually dissolve and break down.

THE ONLY CERTAINTY you can expect is the certainty of change. Everybody wants things to be permanent—they don't want to age, don't want to sicken, and don't want to die. They want to always be young and beautiful. It both can't and won't be that way. Everything you take as permanent has impermanence hidden within.

DESIRE is inherently self-torture.

Sensual desire involves both pleasure and pain—if we only experienced the pain, it would probably be easier to abandon, right?

You lose, because you had.

Somebody asked Ajahn Anan the question, "What are the three characteristics?"

He replied, "They are the inherent principles of everything within the conditioned world. Namely: *anicca*, that all things are impermanent and uncertain; *dukkha*, that all things are in a state unable to endure; and *anattā*, that all phenomena lack a true self."

"Together, these principles of anicca, dukkha, and anattā form a perpetual truth that everything in the conditioned world is in a constant state of change—simply arising, existing, and then passing."

"Anicca is the state of things being impermanent and uncertain. Uncertainty is certain. It's certain that conditioned phenomena are this way, and that everything we experience exists in a state of uncertainty. To put it simply, the only certainty is that there is uncertainty."

“Dukkha is the state of being unable to endure. The state of being unable to endure means everything is in a constant state of change. This is a permanent truth: everything changes.”

“Anattā means that there is no true, abiding self. Within any constantly changing conditioned entity, it’s impossible to find a permanent self—this is a perpetual truth.”

Although mental impurities sometimes give you pleasurable feelings, they're still impermanent, suffering and not-self all the same.

As long as any of the realms—sensual, material, or immaterial—exist, birth must still exist. While birth exists, becoming must also exist, bringing suffering along with it.

In Pāli, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, the word for world can also be translated as darkness. As the world develops, people who have morality and the Dhamma become fewer, and civilization plunges further into darkness.

Avijjā, fundamental ignorance, is the power behind clinging, and this ignorance is the reason we attach to everything in experience. We attach to birth, never realizing that whatever is born must die.

Ajahn Chah was always telling people, "Everyone wants to be born, but no one wants to die."

Without exception, every one of us has to die, so what are you going to do with your life? How will you choose to live it? What good will you do for yourself and the world?

A householder was asking about future natural disasters and Ajahn Anan gave an answer which jolted the questioner's mind back to the present: "There was a seven-year-old girl at the time of the Buddha who was wise enough to answer that she didn't know when, where, or how she would die, but she did know that she would die. The Buddha praised her by saying that the world is filled with darkness, and those who see clearly are few."

One thing Ajahn Chah always said was, "People are afraid of death, but not afraid of birth." When you die, mental defilements, craving and clinging pull you straight into another birth.

See the danger in the endless cycle of saṃsāra: being born and then aging, aging and then getting sick, getting sick and then dying, dying and then being born again—on and on endlessly. This is where suffering lies.

Life races towards death without resting or stopping, like an avalanche crashing down from all four directions—there's nowhere to run or hide. Just as you would do anything to escape if trapped inside a burning house, you must do everything you can to escape this vicious cycle of saṃsāra.

There isn't enough space in the whole of Thailand to pile up the bones of just one person's deaths in saṃsāra. Although you can measure and calculate the surface area of the planet, the number of times you've been born and died in saṃsāra is incalculable.

Some questions can at first seem naive, but Ajahn Anan has the ability to reveal their underlying profundity. Once he was asked, "Why isn't the world fair?"

He answered, "Kamma is fairness. Kamma is the principle that governs all equality and fairness of the world."

When you're sick, there's no use complaining or blaming outside situations because this kind of fault-finding never ends and the physical suffering doesn't go away. You really want to blame something? Blame your body for inherently being of the nature to experience sickness.

Everything about the body is suffering. If you sit a lot, it hurts. If you lie down all the time, it hurts. Even if you eat too much you experience suffering.

Nothing in this world truly belongs to you—even this body. You're not its owner: it belongs to the world.

A western monk brought a photo of his mother who was sick with cancer to show Ajahn Anan. He explained that she was terrified of dying and asked Ajahn Anan what he could do. The Ajahn advised: "She should contemplate the fact that if one isn't afraid of death one still dies, and if one is afraid of death, well, it'll still happen. If someone is afraid of death, that's when they'll suffer. Get her to accept the truth that death happens to all of us—not just her alone."

When you're born, all you're doing is borrowing elements from the world for a body. When life's time is up, you have to return them.

Everything—from your youth to your acquisitions—fades and causes you longing. Everything eventually dissipates and disintegrates right before your eyes.

To be at one with death is the best thing you can do. You'll always be in the present, because you're with the truth. Being at one with death stops you from thinking aimlessly about things of no benefit.

There's never been, nor ever will be, someone who doesn't have to die. Even if you enjoy the finest of luxuries or endure the coarsest existence, in the end you'll still die. Whether you're rich, poor, young, old, ordained or living the household life, everyone has to die. It doesn't matter how many people are continually born into the world, because every one of them will eventually die.

There are over 7 billion people on the planet at the moment. Within the next 100 years, all those people will be dead. If there were no more new births, every year over 70 million people would disappear off the face of the earth, and soon we'd all be wiped out. However, because there are always new births, we don't see this process of death stealing all of us away.

Never be negligent with your life; as much as possible, recollect the fact you have to die. Every day, remind yourself, *today might be my last day*. Each in-breath you take may be your last. Every out-breath you take may be your last.

Younger people see death as something far off, so when they sit meditation and even a little discomfort arises, they move around and change their posture. However, when older people meditate, they realize death is coming soon, so they sit still as a post and prepare themselves.

At the moment of death, recollect all the good kamma you made throughout life and your death will be peaceful. From this state you will move onto a fortunate rebirth.

After attending a funeral one day, a Western monk asked Ajahn Anan, "Why do they pour water over the dead's hands in Thailand? We don't do it in the West." A common Thai response would likely be that the ritual expresses grief and signifies gratitude and respect for the loved one.

However, Ajahn Anan answered: "It's so people can see that when death comes you can't even keep one drop of water. Your hands can't grasp anything anymore and you can't take anything with you." He elaborated further, "When people go to funerals, they sit around talking and eating. In the end it becomes a social gathering, but nobody takes the event as a reason for contemplation. They don't recollect: *One day I'll be the same as this person and I'll have to die as well.* They're negligent; this truth doesn't enter their mind at all."

When you die you're unable to take a single thing with you, so why are you craving for, and attaching to, everything while you're alive?

Even if you seek material possessions from the world, in the end you can't take one thing with you. It isn't like searching for the Dhamma—something you can take with you when you die.

You don't know whether you'll die today, tomorrow, or when you're fifty, sixty, or seventy. It's not certain when or where you'll die, so right now, what goodness would you leave the world with?

REFLECTIONS for practitioners

The greatest kind of happiness is the happiness of a calm mind.

Any kind of valuable outer possession fails to compare with the inner wealth of a beautiful heart.

WORLDLY HAPPINESS can be compared to a magician's trick or a mirage. In actuality, it's just an illusion we have been fooled into thinking is real.

YOU HAVE TO develop the mind from that of a normal person, *puthujjana*, to that of a good person, *kalyānajana*, and from that of a good person to that of an enlightened person, *ariyajana*. To do this, the work in the beginning is morality, the work in the middle is concentration, and the work at the end is wisdom.

Generosity will help cure greed; morality will help cure hatred; meditation will help cure delusion.

The Buddha said there are ten kinds of happiness. The happiness derived from sensual pleasures is the lowest of those ten. There are still other, higher kinds of happiness—like the happiness of liberation—so why do we give the lowest one so much importance?

Searching for and acquiring material possessions can bring about a certain kind of satisfaction, but this feeling doesn't last long. The happiness eventually fades, and you have to search again, this time wanting more. This process continues with no end in sight. Unfortunately, what you don't see is that this process gives rise to greater attachment, longing, and in the end, greater suffering. What you perceive to be giving rise to happiness is actually giving rise to suffering.

Therefore, one of the principal teachings of Buddhism is to know moderation. Knowing moderation means understanding that the essence of real happiness is not found in material possessions, but in a heart imbued with the Dhamma—a heart that accepts life according to its truths.

To accumulate worldly possessions is fine, but you have to continually teach and remind yourself that whenever an object is acquired, it

will eventually disappear. Whenever you have gain, there will be loss. Fame eventually leads to disrepute, praise turns to blame, and happiness eventually changes to suffering; these eight worldly conditions are inseparable pairs that affect every aspect of your life.

A monk asked Ajahn Anan, "How should people who want freedom practice and contemplate the Dhamma?"

"Contemplate outer freedom and inner freedom," Ajahn Anan replied. "If you truly understand the difference between the two, then wherever you are or whatever situation you're in, you'll be free. This body you're in causes unending suffering, and attachment to the five aggregates is the furthest thing from freedom even if on the outside you think you're free."

A LOT OF PEOPLE understand Buddhism as a religion where they ask and pray for things. They bow to the Buddha image and ask for assistance, but if they don't get what they wish for, they become embittered, thinking that the Buddha didn't help them. They're forgetting the fundamental truth of existence and the heart of what the Buddha was teaching: *attā hi attano nātho*, one must be one's own refuge. If you want something, put in the causes for it yourself. Don't rely on some outside entity.

Never practice being a weak person; practice becoming a strong one.

Think how much you have to go through in life to consider yourself a success. For example, if you want to be a doctor, how many years do you have to study, and then how many more do you have to work before you can consider yourself successful? Ajahn Chah said if you want to reach the highest success in the Dhamma, you have to put your life on the line. If you're still not dead, then give it everything you've got.

If you have no mindfulness, concentration won't arise. You'll feel defeated from never having developed true happiness from the practice. Be determined. Whenever you have spare time—one full day or even half a day—give everything to the practice. However, what will be of most value is taking time on a daily basis to practice meditation. Do it every day. Look after the mind. Watch over the emotions. Make sure you are developing wholesome mind states continually and your practice is sure to progress.

You also have to rely on listening to Dhamma talks and reading books to help make the mind more and more beautiful. Depending on your individual spiritual development,[4] peace and calm will gradually increase accordingly. When the time is ripe, the mind will become still and wisdom will arise, giving you the greatest happiness you have ever experienced.

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[4] Refers to the Pāli word *pārami*. See glossary.

Every day, think out a plan—not a plan in a worldly sense, but a plan on how you're going to meditate that day and what methods you're going to use to develop the mind. Keep your meditation going continuously, but do it with an attitude of letting go. Being able to let go isn't something near or far off in the future: letting go is now.

Many visitors come to Wat Marp Jan and look at the Uposatha hall and comment on its beauty and the peaceful atmosphere of the monastery in general. Ajahn Anan always reminds them, "Even though you may think a place is good, it's just outer beauty. The true place of beauty and goodness is within us."

A HOUSEHOLDER ASKED AJAHN ANAN, "Who paid for all the buildings in the monastery?"

"The goodness of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha," he answered.

"But where do you get the money from?"

"Many people gathered together in a combined effort to help out. Whoever has conviction enough to give, they give, no matter how large or small."

Ajahn Anan later commented to the monks, "Look at a gigantic waterfall in nature: when you get up close, there's no pipe or machine pumping out water to make it cascade over the falls. A waterfall comes from many individual raindrops falling from the sky, gathering together on the earth and forming a stream that eventually flows on to become a beautiful waterfall. Never think something little is insignificant—anything big is made up of many small parts."

One day the workers' union of a factory came to the monastery and asked to hear some teachings. Ajahn Anan told them, "A union has to be true to its name—everybody gathering together as one. Therefore, whatever it is you're all doing, it has to be done in harmony and by listening to one another. At first when there are only a few of you, everyone gets along and is united by the same cause. However, as the organization grows and more people come into the picture, people's sense of self and conceit creep in as well, making harmony difficult."

A famous dhamma quote by Ajahn Chah states: "There is suffering because you attach, and suffering remains because you cling. Suffering increases because you interfere. Suffering decreases because you stop. And you're free from suffering because you let go."

When someone asked Ajahn Anan what interfere in this instance meant, he replied, "Usually when you're just minding your own business, there's no suffering. But as soon as you get involved and poke your nose into other people's affairs, you suffer along with them."

Just as you use something cool to subdue heat, use kindness to put out anger whenever it arises.

When you do your work with mindfulness, that activity won't cause you any suffering. Never let the mind stray off. Just knowing the present moment is enough. The more you stay in the present moment, the more power the mind has.

When some people work for the benefit of others, their own minds become irritated. Although helping is a wholesome action that should bring happiness, it has the opposite effect on them. While their action is right, their thinking is wrong. Never try to build a sense of self-importance from helping others: work on the mind as well.

A monk told Ajahn Anan, "I continually show kindness and speak well to others, but they don't reciprocate. I'm trying to perform wholesome speech and action towards them, but it's not working."

Ajahn Anan answered, "This shows that you're developing goodness but want something out of it—that's why you're suffering."

"Well, if I continue to be kind towards them, it shows that I'm an idiot who doesn't get the message," the monk replied.

"When you give kindness, you're the one who benefits the most. If you have kindness towards someone and they don't reciprocate, which one of you is really the idiot?"

In Thai marriages, it's considered auspicious to tie two pieces of string in loops around the head of both the bride and groom, joining them together. Ajahn Anan commented on this to a married couple one day: "Notice at weddings they tie two loops around the couple's heads—one loop for each but joined together. It means that you are bound together, rely on one another, and must listen to one another, not that one head goes one way while the other head goes another. They can't go off in separate directions. If one head is heavy, the other head needs to be strong. When one head speaks, the other head has to listen. If you want to win over the other person, you have to be willing to lose to them sometimes."

A couple asked Ajahn Anan for an auspicious time and date to get married. Instead, he gave them some food for thought about the situation: "What actually *is* an auspicious date? When couples get their fortunate time and date predicted, they're happy and believe it's the best day. On that time and date they put their whole heart into the occasion and make it the best day imaginable. However, notice that as time passes by, these two become closer to each other and are able to share more of their inner feelings. Eventually, they start to share their grievances with one another and then start arguing more and more. In time, they lose their patience and abuse each other continually. In the end, they may even split up or divorce."

The Ajahn continued: "People from all walks of life are looking for the most auspicious times and dates. Notice though that sometimes the things they were trying to carry out don't work. Why is that? It's because that even though a certain

day is auspicious, the couple forgets to make every day auspicious. You have to constantly watch over your mind, watch over your speech and actions, and keep good moral standards in life. Do good deeds every day of your life, and every day will be a good day. Do this and every day being together will be an auspicious day."

If you want to run your life according to astrology and the stars, run it according to the astrology of mindfulness. To watch over this kind of astrology is to watch over the star of the mind, seeing whether it is endowed with a sense of giving, morality, and the Dhamma.

If there are problems, but the mind doesn't associate and involve itself in them, those problems cease.

While Ajahn Anan was waiting at the airport one day, airlines were experiencing delays due to a major difficulty that couldn't be corrected. Other travelers, from tourists to businessmen, were livid. Ajahn Anan simply remarked, "The reason people suffer is because they expect things to always be convenient and easy. Anytime there's a small problem, they make it out to be a big problem."

AJAHN ANAN SAID one day, "Kids have kid problems; adults have adult problems."

"So there's nowhere we can go to escape from our problems?" a monk asked.

"In the mind," replied Ajahn Anan. "If there are no more problems in the mind, wherever you are there will be no problems—if you're with a lot of people you'll have no problems, and if you're by yourself, you'll have no problems."

THE MOST IMPORTANT aspect of being a parent is having right view. If you have right view, you will pass it on to your children.

THE WHOLE REASON behind the chaos and breakdown of society is simply greed, hatred, and delusion.

IF ALL YOUR progress comes from outside but the mind never progresses, you fall into greater delusion and experience even more suffering than at present. In a practical sense, hell is just the mind in a state of suffering.

News came out about a world superpower that had built a new space shuttle. When Ajahn Anan heard the news he said, "The whole world is competing against each other to build better material objects. The more things we build, the more we attach to and become deluded by them. The world is developing at a blinding pace—space shuttles, magnet-propelled trains—we can build anything. However, we still can't become free from our suffering, and really that's the most important thing we should be working on."

Ajahn Anan told the story of a lady who never kept the fourth precept—that of abstaining from wrong speech such as lying, coarse speech, and gossip. One day she spoke harshly to someone, and they stabbed her to death. Reflecting on the event, Ajahn Anan later observed, "People with no morality die easily, and when they die, they're just another dead body—worthless. This is why morality is so important: it's the best life insurance you can have."

When anyone praised the Buddha, he said, “Praise simply arises, remains, and then passes.” When anyone criticized him, the Buddha said, “Criticism simply arises, remains, and then passes.”

Ajahn Chah would say: “If you meet someone large, duck under their legs; if they’re little, leap over them.” This means that if you meet someone who is pretentious and conceited, you should be humble and polite to them and there’ll be no problems. If you meet someone shallow and disrespectful, don’t get worked up over it—just pass him by.

Ajahn Chah used to give an example about the power of conceited self-view and the influence it has over people. He would tell the story of two men who were close friends and regularly came to the monastery together. One of them happened to like lemons, while the other didn't. When eating lunch one day, one of them decided to squeeze lemon onto the food they were sharing. His friend became upset, arguing with him until they both went their separate ways. They haven't spoken to each other since…all because of a lemon. This is the blinding effect the sense of self can have over us.

People ask, "What do devas[5] look like? Do they wear crowns like in the pictures? Do ones from different countries look the same?" These questions are useless—they just refer to outer appearances. What's important to remember is that a deva is someone who has a good mind, who has a sense of shame of wrong-doing, and is fearful of the consequences of committing wrong actions. The real deva is inside.

You neglect to see the things right here in front of you. Instead, you want to see all the things you can't.

[5] Celestial beings. See glossary.

People who use Buddhism as an academic study often compare the doctrine of kamma to the law of cause and effect in science. Ajahn Anan reflected on this by saying, “People only study the way we’re subject to kamma theoretically, never how kamma traps them personally.”

These days, information travels quickly. Whatever it is you want to know, it’s right in the palm of your hand. If you want to follow politics twenty-four hours a day, you can. If you want to continually watch movies, there’s no shortage of them. Really, the emotions brought on by constant access to all this information are too much for one person to take in, so it’s important to be mindful of how much information you are consuming.

In the uposatha hall at Wat Marp Jan, there is a statue of the Buddha sitting in meditation with a seven-headed Nāga[6] sheltering his head. In response to people's questions about its meaning, Ajahn Anan explained, "The Buddha in the statue represents his teachings, the Dhamma; as the Buddha said, 'Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees the Tathāgatha[7].' The many-headed Nāga represents the Buddhist community. If the Buddhist community studies and practices the Dhamma, they will protect the path of practice and the teachings of the Buddha. Just as the Nāga spreads over the Buddha's head, protecting him in the statue, so a community that practices well will protect the Dhamma."

[6] Celestial serpent, similar to a dragon. See glossary.
[7] An epithet for the Buddha. See glossary.

After a Dhamma discussion with a householder, Ajahn Anan gave some final words of encouragement by saying to him, "May you see the Dhamma in seven days." He was grateful to receive such gracious words of encouragement, but felt that perhaps he couldn't live up to the task. After a moment, Ajahn Anan explained further: "If not on a Sunday, then on a Monday. If not on a Monday, then on a Tuesday, or a Wednesday…whatever day it is, may you see the Dhamma."

New meditators have lots of doubts and tend to ask many questions. Ajahn Anan always shows kindness to these people and answers all of them in great detail. After finishing answering a series of questions one day, Ajahn Anan added, "Even though I've given you all the answers, don't just blindly believe me. You have to practice for yourself to really understand."

REFLECTIONS for sangha

As monks, you have gone forth towards the noblest attainment possible. Endeavor to be the most humble, restrained and peaceful monastic who gives the most and who abandons the most.

Only when the mind sees impermanence, suffering and not-self, does it become noble—that of a true monk.

Now that you have gone forth, do whatever it takes to make the heart good.

The reason we [monks] have it so easy these days is because the great masters of our tradition went through enormous hardships before us to spread Buddhism. However, what they went through is nothing compared to what the Buddha endured. For each grain of rice we consume in our lives, he worked a million lifetimes to accumulate enough merit to become the Buddha.

It's easy to build a beautiful monastery; it's harder to build a beautiful mind.

While students receive scholarships to study, you monks also receive scholarships—scholarships from the Buddha. People give all the requisites for living as an offering, not to you, but to the Buddha. Never be negligent in the practice as this will only get you deeper into debt. Always be diligent towards your duties as a monastic; only then will you be able to eventually pay off your debt to the Buddha.

Once, at a funeral, a monk Ajahn Anan told to give a talk asked if he could read from a Dhamma book instead.

Ajahn Anan responded, "If you're going to give a talk like that, you may as well not eat any more food that's been prepared for you. The life of a householder is busy; they have to work, and on top of that, put aside their time and effort to prepare food for you. What sort of monk are you? You can't prepare enough to give a talk! Why should they bother to prepare food for you? You should be ashamed of yourself in their presence. Just eat raw rice from now on. Remember, each one of you, that you're a monk, and you have to rely on householders to support your life."

When they come back from India, people often comment on the poverty and large number of beggars they saw. Ajahn Anan reminds the monks, "These are some of the poorest people on the planet, but never forget, you're actually poorer than they are. Even your basic requisites don't belong to you—they belong to the Buddha's dispensation. It's the same with every monastery, no matter who is there or where it is. Everything householders give, they give to the Buddha and his dispensation, not to you. The only thing you have as a monk is this bare, naked body to make use of for a period of time, sustaining it just enough every day so you can keep practicing. Make sure you give everything you've got to this practice."

YOU NEW MONKS have few responsibilities and a lot of time on your hands, so hurry up and get the most out of your practice. Every day the sun is rising and setting: make sure something improves along the way.

FOOD, SHELTER, THE MONASTERY—everything is in place and nothing lacking. The only thing missing now is your willingness to put the most into the practice.

In Buddhism, the days of the quarter, new, and full moons are called the lunar observance days, Uposatha. On the day before either the new or the full moon, monks will shave their heads in preparation to carry out the Uposatha observances.

Once, as a junior monk was shaving Ajahn Anan's head, the Ajahn remarked to him, "On Uposatha days, you shave everything off and throw it away—your hair, eyebrows, beard, fingernails, toenails—you gradually throw away this body. Use this practice and reflection for all your feelings, emotions and defilements: shave everything off and throw it all away."

Sometimes Ajahn Anan encourages the monks to use candles in their huts instead of electricity. This not only creates an atmosphere conducive to meditation, but saves electricity as well.

A householder came on one of the nights when all the lights were out and asked Ajahn Anan why the monastery was so dark. After explaining the situation, he told the householder, "In general, as the practice is developing, the brighter the outside, the darker the inside. However, the reality is that it doesn't matter whether it's bright or dark outside as long as you make sure it's always bright inside."

If you break up the word India, you get *in*, and then *dia*, which sounds like *dear*—as in the one you love. Combine the two and you have *the dear one inside*. What is this? It points to whatever is inside the sphere of this body. When you investigate within the body, you'll see that the real place of pilgrimage, the real India, is inside us. This is where the Buddha is.

When soldiers go into battle they need weapons—guns, explosives and more—to fight their enemies. Going into battle with the defilements is the same. You need the five weapons: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin[8] to fight the enemy.

If you want the mind to become truly beautiful, you must investigate all the beautiful things in the world as inherently unbeautiful.

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[8] See glossary, *asubha*.

When people go to India, they often come back and complain about how dirty it was.

Ajahn Anan reminds them, "You think India's dirty? What about your own body? This body is way filthier than India. Not just your own body, but everyone's body. You go to someone else's country dragging along this filthy thing you've got, and then complain that their country is dirty. How are you going to justify criticizing a place for being dirty when what you've dragged there is filthy already?"

A NEW MONK ASKED Ajahn Anan why people had such a fixation on nudity.

Ajahn Anan told him, "Ajahn Chah would say, 'Look at a buffalo, it's got no clothes on, so what are you so excited about?' The problem is that your defilements spin out of control and tell you those objects that aren't attractive are beautiful, and those objects that stink actually smell sweet. However, when these objects reach the end of their lifespan, where is their beauty and sweetness?"

THE OLD SAYING, "We're all the same skin-deep" is true—gruesome and covered in blood. Inside this body there is a heart, lungs, kidneys, intestines, stomach. Everyone's the same. As soon as you put a layer of skin over the top, you start categorizing: *this guy is white, that girl is black, she's pretty, he's handsome.* Crazy! It's just clever packaging—a thin layer of skin, but see how much it fools us.

As a meditation monk, stay with your meditation at all times.

Every half-year all the branch monasteries of Ajahn Chah's lineage come together for a bi-annual meeting. With monks from over 300 branch monasteries attending, inconveniences naturally come up. Ajahn Anan reminds people, "It doesn't matter what you eat. It doesn't matter where you sleep. If you have mindfulness with *Buddho*, everything's fine."

Whenever you are eating, contemplate your food as merely elements. If it tastes good, just know it. If it doesn't taste good, just know it.

Monks should be thin. Leave being fat to cows.

If you eat and sleep too much, your meditation will be weak and the defilements will continually multiply and become stronger. As a meditator, you must be on guard—cautious and restrained at all times.

Be careful and always keep your senses guarded. Whenever the eye sees a form or the ear hears a sound, restrain the mind and keep a close watch on how it reacts.

A monk who isn't restrained in his senses can be compared to a tiny bird that has flown into a storm too violent for its strength. The wind thrashes the bird this way and that, battering its little body that is too weak to fight against the onslaught. Eventually, even though it fought as hard as it could, the bird crashes and dies.

Just like this feeble little bird, a monk who isn't restrained in his senses will be violently thrashed around by the storm of feelings and emotions. With his mindfulness too weak to fight against the onslaught of the storm, in the end, well…he ends up like the bird.

There are many monks who only study the Dhamma and don't practice. Ajahn Anan tells them, "Looking inside a book can't compare to looking inside the body."

Even if you meticulously study the Abhidhamma[9] in great detail, it's still just information in your memory, not the real truth. Correctly investigating and contemplating the Dhamma is a similar process to thinking, but it's thinking within the state of a calm mind.

[9] Detailed rendering of the Buddhist texts. See glossary.

THE THAI ECCLESIASTICAL SANGHA occasionally dispenses honors by giving out a *patyot*, a fan monks use in Buddhist ceremonies. After receiving such an honor, Ajahn Anan commented, "The honor from this fan is with the fan, not with any individual. If you attach to the honors, it becomes a fan that gives off heat, if you don't attach to it, it becomes a fan that gives off coolness."

WHEN AJAHN CHAH received the formal position of *Jao Kun* from the Thai Ecclesiastical Sangha, many people came to congratulate him. He kept reminding them, "The tide and the waves of a river go up and down, but the bridge doesn't go up and down with it, right?"

When i was at Wat Nong Pah Pong, there was a very intelligent monk well versed in the scriptures. He asked Ajahn Chah for permission to teach dependent origination to the monks by way of charts and diagrams. Ajahn Chah gave him permission and the monks gathered together in the Dhamma hall to hear his exposition. This monk explained the topic with both clarity and detail, putting on quite an impressive show of his apparent deep knowledge into the Dhamma.

That night I was assisting Ajahn Chah. He turned to me and said, “Anan, let’s go and see what this guy is teaching everyone.” We both quietly walked to the hall and stood outside in the dark without anybody noticing us. We listened for a while and then Ajahn Chah said, “When you teach the Dhamma wrong, you drop to hell! Come on Anan, let’s get out of here.” He never said another word about it again.

The moral here is that if you teach the Dhamma but don't see and know it truly within your own heart, then no matter how smart you may be, you can end up teaching the wrong way and develop bad kamma for yourself.

After the evening chanting one night, Ajahn Anan commented to one of the monks, "While chanting tonight, I contemplated the question: *as a monk, what material objects does one personally possess?* For householders, they may have a job, savings, house, car, investments, and even though these things are just conventions, they still own them. However for monks, even though one may be head of a large monastery with lots of material requisites, those requisites belong to the Buddha's dispensation. Householders give or build these requisites as an offering to the Buddha's dispensation. As monastics, all we possess are the eight basic requisites of a monk—like a bowl and robe—so look after them well."

AJAHN ANAN NEVER misses the opportunity to turn even the smallest things in life into a teaching. For example, he advises the monks about cleaning their huts: “You have to organize and clean your hut every day, taking time to be by yourself and doing a good job. Do it with the thought: *I might die sometime later today, so how will this place look?* If people come in and see it’s a mess, they’ll know for sure that I wasn’t practicing well and think there’s no way I’ve gone to a good destination.”

Ajahn Anan will often use formal occasions, like the Uposatha observances, to emphasize the importance of thorough attention to detail within the monastic life. One day before the fortnightly recitation of the training rules, the monk who was about to chant the rules asked for permission to start and then, without waiting for a response, began to chant.

Ajahn Anan quickly stopped him and said, "Hold on! I haven't given permission to start yet." Ajahn Anan then told all the monks to change their positions around according to seniority, saying, "Even though things like sitting according to seniority are merely formalities and conventions, it's still important to abide by them."

As junior monks, learn to develop a sense of respect for those who are senior to you. Even though sometimes you may not like someone or may think they aren't a good example, you have to learn to respect them. When you respect those who are senior, you are paying respects to the Dhamma-Vinaya and to the Buddha. As for you senior monks, show kindness and consideration for those junior to you. If they need to be taught something or admonished, always do it from an attitude of kindness. If both junior and senior monks practice in this way, getting along harmoniously and peacefully will never be a problem.

A monk asked, "Why do I have to respect other monks here? Isn't it enough that I just respect you? These monks have defilements the same as me, so why should I respect them?"

Ajahn Anan answered, "Get those thoughts out of your head—they're totally wrong. You respect others because they have faith to ordain just like you, so they must have some goodness. If they didn't, they wouldn't have ordained. You also should respect them because many realized this aspiration long before you did. If you respect others, you're respecting the Vinaya.[10] If you respect the Vinaya, you are respecting the Buddha."

The monk further quarreled, "Well, what if they tell me to do something ridiculous that I can't do?"

[10] Buddhist Monastic Code of Conduct. See glossary.

“This is where you speak nicely with them: ‘Sorry to be an inconvenience, but at the moment I’m just not physically able to do this.’ Learn to speak politely to people. Train yourself to look for the positive traits of others. You don’t have to train to look at the negative traits in people—most of you are great at that already.”

Ajahn Chah used to say, "Even if it's only a novice speaking, if it's the Dhamma, it's worth listening to."

Don't look to me as your example of how to behave and practice: Look back to Ajahn Chah, take him as your example. Look back even further to the Buddha and take the Buddha as your highest example.

When you take on a teacher as your mentor and guide, you have to be willing to practice according to their instructions and gradually let them change your character from coarse to refined.

You monks should practice overcoming painful sensations because if you don't, when sickness comes, will your mindfulness be strong enough to conquer it?

When you come to ordain, you give up the world; therefore, it's inappropriate for you to rely on your parents or family to look after you anymore. As monks, you have to help look after one and other.

Parents of monks always ask their kids what they've gained from ordaining. *Gained,* in terms of Buddhist practice, means laid down. If you lay down your erroneous thoughts, your views, and your sense of self, then you have truly gained.

A MONK CAME TO pay respects to Ajahn Anan and explained that because of an illness, he hadn't been able to visit for a long time.

Ajahn Anan told him, "When you're sick, there's no need to go and visit teachers because the body is teaching you the Dhamma at every moment. It's just like having the Buddha right there teaching you constantly. When you're sick, it's important not to be negligent. Practice a lot and have mindfulness when painful feelings arise. If there is sickness within the body, this should spur you on to practice even harder."

Ajahn Anan was telling the story of a monk who used to be a soldier. While deep in the forest on retreat, he became afraid because he didn't have a gun beside his bed as he was accustomed to.

Ajahn Anan reminded the monks, "You have no physical weapons—the only weapon you have to fight with is the Dhamma."

It is when you're caught in a life-threatening situation that the Dhamma will help you. It is as the Buddha said: "The Dhamma guards those who practice earnestly."

While walking back to his hut in the middle of the forest one night, a monk was contemplating his body as a pile of bones. Soon, thinking there actually was a skeleton following him, he became so frightened that he wanted to run away from himself. Instead of contemplation leading to peace and understanding, it lead him to become fearful of his own shadow.

When he asked Ajahn Anan about this experience, the Ajahn replied, "You're trying to use wise reflection, but your reflections aren't wise. You're using your thinking mind to contemplate in the wrong way and your imagination is running out of control. If these experiences arise again, direct your mind to something else, like *Buddho* or *Itipi so*.[11] Contemplate the fear: see how it arises and what its cause is, and then see how it eventually disappears. This is using reflection wisely."

[11] *Itipi so*: The starting phrase of the traditional epitaph recollecting the qualities of the Buddha. In this context, Ajahn Anan uses only this first phrase to encourage mentally reciting the full qualities of the Buddha as a meditation object.

Use fear as your greatest teacher.

A new monk who was easily frightened came to ordain with Ajahn Anan. The Ajahn sent him to stay in an old, gloomy hut, but he wasn't brave enough to move in and so asked if he could stay somewhere else.

Ajahn Anan told him, "If your mind is firm and concentrated, fear will be turned into wisdom, but if your mind isn't concentrated, fear will be turned into delusion."

When young monks come to Ajahn Anan with fantasies about returning to lay life, he often reminds them, "Whatever your defilements are telling you, keep letting them know that none of these imaginary things are certain."

After the fortnightly recitation of the rules close to the end of the rains retreat, Ajahn Anan gave a talk and told the monks, "It's close to the end of the rains, but there's no need for you new monks to think about the world outside. You only have a little time left—make the most of it and practice. Also, never speak to each other about disrobing and the world outside. You're deluded enough by yourself already; don't go spreading it to others so they can be deluded along with you. The world's a confused and deranged place already—why go and add to that confusion and disorder by disrobing?"

Ajahn Anan likes to tease older monks who are getting slack in their practice, saying, "When you first ordain, Nibbāna seems really close so you sprint for it. However as time passes, it starts to seem farther away, so you slow down and start to jog or maybe even relax into a casual stroll."

One monk told Ajahn Anan that he felt disappointed because, although he put a lot of effort into his practice, he only received minimal results.

Ajahn Anan reminded him, "Disappointment is a trick of the defilements trying to make you quit."

A monk who had been ordained for eight years was starting to doubt himself because his practice had yet to yield results. He was getting jealous of his older brother, who had built a stable career and earned a lot of money. After listening to his worries, Ajahn Anan told him, "He's stable, but without real stability."

Ajahn Chah always used to say, "Ordaining isn't easy, eh? It's like having to give up the most beautiful, stunning woman—no easy task!"

Individually, you have five aggregates subject to clinging that are the cause of suffering. While you're a monk, you only have five, but if you were to disrobe and get married, you'd be taking on another five—you'd have ten. Your already heavy burden will have been doubled. If you want to see the beauty in life, learn to see its sufferings.

A young novice asked Ajahn Anan, "Why doesn't everyone ordain?"

Ajahn Anan replied, "People neglect to see the suffering in life. They fail to realize the happiness they're chasing is only an illusion: like a mirage in the desert, it has no essence or substance."

When i was a junior monk, I had a problem with bleeding gums. One day while I was assisting Ajahn Chah, someone offered him a glass of orange juice. I innocently thought to myself: *orange juice has a lot of vitamin C—it would probably be good for my gums.* Just that one thought and Ajahn Chah turned to me, pointed at the glass, and said, "That's the fountain of death right there!" Words can't explain how dumbfounded I was at that moment. The lesson he taught me that day was that whenever there is craving, it will be the cause for us to remain trapped within the cycle of birth and death, even if it's just for something as small as a glass of orange juice.

While Ajahn Anan was assisting Ajahn Chah at Wat Gor Nawk, three monks from Korea came to pay respects and ask a question. After polite formalities had ended, the Korean monks asked Ajahn Chah, "Why do we have to practice, what do we practice for, how do we practice, and what results should we get from the practice?"

Without a second of hesitation, Ajahn Chah asked them these counter questions: "Why do we have to eat, what do we eat for, how do we eat, and what's the result of eating?" At that, they were overwhelmed with joy. They told Ajahn Chah that they had been traveling the world asking this same question to all the revered Buddhist masters of the time and had never received a satisfactory answer until then. As this was all they had come to ask, the Korean monks left soon afterwards.

Many years later, Ajahn Anan recalled the event: "See that! They left straight after because

that's all they needed to know—they understood and saw clearly. They were true monks. A monk isn't an outer appearance. The true monk lies in the heart. The outer appearance is a just convention for householders to know who we are. I saw the whole exchange—Ajahn Chah's mindfulness and wisdom were so sharp. As I listened, I felt rapture and a deep appreciation for the opportunity I had to be close to such a great, enlightened being whose teachings arose instantaneously within the present."

A monk asked Ajahn Anan, "Suppose I want to intensify my practice and make some big determinations, but I'm scared that Māra[12] will come and challenge me. What should I do?"

Ajahn Anan replied, "The only Māra you should be scared of is the Māra of never really being determined."

[12] Refers to an evil being in the Buddhist scriptures. See glossary.

When ajahn anan was a young monk training under Ajahn Chah, he had many doubts about the practice. Walking meditation one day, he wondered: *what's the most direct way to enlightenment? How do I know if I'm following the right path? If I was certain of the path, I'd put everything I've got into the practice.*

Remarkably, that night Ajahn Chah gave a talk where he emphasized over and over again, "The most direct path to enlightenment is to never let the mind fall into liking or disliking."

When a disappointed monk asked Ajahn Anan how much longer it would be until he realized the Dhamma, the Ajahn told him, "It's like you're swimming in a deep ocean at night with no light—you don't know when you'll get to shore. You can't be certain; you might only be a few meters away! Never quit practicing. If you quit, you'll drown for sure."

When i was a young monk, I would always hear Ajahn Chah say, "If you can eat right, you can meditate right." Being younger and less experienced, I didn't understand what this meant, but as I grew in the practice, I realized, *it's exactly like that.*

REFLECTIONS on liberation

WHAT DOES IT mean to see the Dhamma? It means you truly break through and understand everything that arises as merely a convention: this knowledge is liberation. The more you contemplate all things as conventions, the clearer your understanding becomes. Greed, hatred, and delusion are gradually reduced to the point where they disappear from the mind.

At that point, the mind experiences true emptiness, perfect peace.

Buddho literally means the knowing, awakened, and joyous one. The knowing is the knowing that all things are impermanent. Awakened is the state of awakening from both happiness and suffering. Joyous is the quality that comes from understanding that all things are not-self and are inherently empty.

If you're still attaching to emptiness, you haven't reached true emptiness.

While anything at all remains in the mind, mental defilements have yet to die. Greed, hatred, delusion, fear—all these impurities remain buried deep within, so you must continue to do everything possible to bring the mind to true peace.

The most direct path for one to realize the Dhamma is to make the mind impenetrable to liking or disliking. Always have mindfulness well established when wholesome or unwholesome states arise, because both simply arise, remain, and pass away. Therefore, both are inherently suffering.

If you watch the mind continually and never let it fall into liking or disliking, your mindfulness will become stronger and more firmly established. When mindfulness is firm, you will naturally have more wisdom and will be more circumspect with your morality.

From just watching over the mind, you will develop the threefold training of morality, concentration and wisdom. To the degree that these three factors gather together, one's clarity of understanding will increase. The Buddha gave 84,000 teachings throughout his dispensation, but they all converge within this threefold

training. Even though for ease of understanding we separate each aspect, in reality they are one and the same.

All mind and matter are impermanent, suffering, and not-self. The highest realization of this is the realization of emptiness.

It is when the mind neither attaches to liking nor disliking that one will see the Dhamma and see Nibbāna. Liberation arises from consistent effort and not being negligent in the practice.

The more you keep mindfulness—staying with *Buddho*—the closer you become to the Buddha.

Whenever you have a moment's mindfulness, you're one step closer to Nibbāna.

It takes great determination to overcome all the impurities in the mind. Even though the path towards purity is a struggle, bringing about all kinds of suffering and hardships, it doesn't matter. The victory is worth the battle you have to fight.

The mental defilements have programmed a sense of self into you, similar to a password. Your job is to crack that code.

The more you abandon greed, hatred and delusion, the more pure and radiant the mind becomes. Every one of you should constantly strive on and patiently endure in the practice. Stay determined and focused—never let those defilements make fun of you.

Deluded with yourself, you forget death. Deluded with the body, you forget illness. Deluded that mind and matter are real and lasting, you forget not-self.

SAÑÑYĀ ANATTĀ: PERCEPTION is not-self. Theoretically, you know this already, but when perception arises within your own mind, you take it as something real, giving it importance and attaching to it. It arises because the grosser feelings you experience in turn give rise to this more refined mental reaction. Therefore, the Buddha compared perception to a hazy cloud, or a mirage: it has no inherent core or essence. When you fall for its illusions, it sends the mind spinning, causing you to fall further into greed, hatred, and delusion. However, if you have enough wisdom to know when distorted perception arises and begins to play its tricks, you instantly let it go.

The mind is neither self nor I—it's just an element of nature. If it truly were self, wouldn't it always remain unchanged as a part of you? In reality, it's simply nature arising, remaining, and then passing away. It's similar to how, when you rub two sticks together vigorously, a fire starts. Whenever there are causes and conditions, phenomena arise; when those causes and condition cease, so do the phenomena.

LAY DOWN SELF-IMPORTANCE, egotism, me, and mine—lay down self. Gradually lay them all down, little by little.

IN EVERY SITUATION, let go, even while others cling.

When you see through the sense of self—realizing that nothing is I or mine—even if anger arises, there will be no consequent emotions of cruelty, vengeance, or hatred that linger and impinge on the mind.

I am neither above, below, near nor far from you, but with mindfulness, you will always be with me.

When people ask Ajahn Anan about the reality of time, he answers, "The Buddha answered this question by telling people that time consumes everything, including itself. This means that time itself doesn't exist. It's not a material thing and it's not a mental phenomenon. In actuality, time isn't something you can find in the world."

Everything, including the universe, is impermanent, suffering, and not-self.

One day Ajahn Anan was hearing out two people who were arguing over a certain matter. In the end he responded, “There’s no me, no you. There is no self, no others. There’s no right, no wrong.”

PEOPLE ARE STARTING to call me *Luang Por*, Venerable Father, now. Anyone who's younger—say under thirty—calls me *Luang Por*. Someone visited me today who was eighty and told me that I was still young. The truth is there is no such thing as young or old: both are just conventions of reality.

GENDER IS SIMPLY a convention. From the perspective of liberation, there is no male or female.

Someone asked Ajahn Anan if he knew who decided that an eye should be called an eye, a nose a nose, an ear an ear, and so on; then he told the Ajahn that he thought this person was brilliant to be able to think these names up.

Ajahn Anan responded: "That person wasn't brilliant. Those who practice meditation to the highest eventually see reality and that these things don't exist. Now that's brilliance."

The mind is the state of constant realization of the present.

Being in the present moment is experiencing enlightenment in the present.

Many people invited Ajahn Chah to India, but no one bought him a ticket. It never worried him though, and he'd say, "Don't you think the Buddha could be born here in Thailand?"

It doesn't matter what country you're from: if your meditation brings you to the place where you realize the Dhamma, you'll see the Buddha right there.

A householder asked, "When the Buddha reached enlightenment, how did he know for sure he had reached true liberation?"

"He knew because of the knowledge and vision of wisdom," Ajahn Anan answered. "After he recalled his previous lives and saw the many births and deaths of all beings and how they fared according to their kamma, he contemplated dependent origination and abandoned all fundamental ignorance within the mind. This knowledge is *paccattaṃ*, that which is known by the wise for themselves."

"However, the Buddha didn't just know and understand these truths, he also had the ability to teach them. That's why they refer to him as *Satthā deva-manussānaṃ*, teacher of beings who can be taught. He is *Buddho*: the awakened, enlightened one. The scope of his knowledge and abilities is beyond the realm of what a normal, unenlightened person can comprehend."

“To make it easy for you to understand, I’ll ask you a question. When you eat, how do you know you’re full?”

When brightness and radiance arise within the mind, darkness and obscurity naturally disappear.

Even the purest, most flawless diamond can't compare to a pure, flawless mind.

The Buddha is neither near nor far from us. The Buddha is within the body, speech and mind of us all.

There are 84,000 teachings that the Buddha left behind, and the essence of all of them is that both mind and matter are impermanent, suffering, and not-self.

After the Buddha's enlightenment, he uttered an inspired saying about breaking the house-builder's ridgepole and rafters.[13] The Buddha had broken those rafters: all rafters have a peak, and the peak of the defilements is fundamental ignorance.

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[13] DHP: 153-4. "Oh house-builder, you are seen! You will not build this house again for your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered. My mind has reached the unconditioned; I have attained the destruction of craving."

According to the commentary, these verses are the Buddha's "Song of Victory," his first utterance after his enlightenment. The *house* is individualized existence in saṃsāra, the *house-builder* craving, the *rafters* the passions and the *ridgepole* ignorance.

Most people think that all enlightened beings have to think the same way about everything. In one respect, they do: they think the same way about impermanence, suffering, and not-self.

Someone asked, "When a person reaches full enlightenment, do they have to use up all their old kamma first?"

Ajahn Anan replied, "Oh no! No one can possibly use it all up. However, the enlightened person has developed the Eightfold Path with its aspects of morality, concentration and wisdom to perfection until he is able to go beyond birth and death."

When the mind has power, it will see this body and the bodies of others as one and the same thing: simply a combination of elements subject to impermanence, suffering, and not-self. If the mind doesn't have this power though, it sees this body as different from others, and experiences feelings of attraction, aversion, and delusion towards them. However, when your meditation practice brings you to deep levels of calm, the natural state of the mind will arise and you will see according to truth.

Keep your mindfulness within the frame of the body: then let everything go.

True wisdom arises from meditation. It is profound knowing, not theorizing.

Ajahn Chah would say, "If you go to outside countries, they are still outside *inside* countries, not outside *outside* countries." What he meant by this is that an outside *inside* country is simply a foreign country on the face of this earth. Going to an outside *outside* country means going beyond the world: leaving all defilements—all greed, hatred, and delusion—behind.

There was a famous teacher in Thailand who would refer to Nibbāna as a crystal city. When a monk asked Ajahn Anan if this analogy was true, he answered, "Make your mind like crystal and see for yourself; it's better than anything outside made of crystal. When the mind becomes perfected, things outside are used only as comparisons to explain it conventionally."

A daily chant at Wat Marp Jan features the line, "*Sabbe dhammā anattā*." Everything that is a conditioned formation and everything that isn't a conditioned formation is not-self, and should not be attached to as self.

One day a monk asked Ajahn Anan, "What actually isn't a conditioned formation? Because from what I can see, everything is a conditioned formation. All materiality—trees, grass, people, and animals, as well as all mentality such as thinking, love, and hate—are conditioned formations. What could possibly be left that's not a conditioned formation?"

Ajahn Anan answered, "Everything that's not conditioned is the unconditioned, is Nibbāna. Nibbāna isn't *saṅkhārā*; it's *visaṅkhārā*.[13] Anyone that attaches to Nibbāna thinking: *I have gained Nibbāna; I am at one with Nibbāna, Nibbāna is inside me*, still hasn't realized Nibbāna."

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[13] Unconditioned phenomena. See glossary.

THE MIND IS one thing, and feelings and emotions are another. The mind isn't the five aggregates; the five aggregates aren't the mind. The mind isn't within the five aggregates either. The highest kind of mind is one that no longer clings and attaches—it lets everything go.

The question was asked, "When you let go of everything, what's left?"

"When you let go of everything, nothing is left," Ajahn Anan answered instantly. "If there were anything remaining, you'd still have suffering. Therefore, when you truly let go of everything, the one who let go is also gone. Only a mind in its perfected state—one of pure happiness and peace—remains, but there is no longer anyone left to attach to it."

There was a student who stayed near me at Wat Nong Pa Pong. One day he went to ask Ajahn Chah some questions. He was a somewhat impatient person, and asked Ajahn Chah what the fastest way to realize the Dhamma was. Was there a quick and easy way he could take?

Without missing a beat, Ajahn Chah answered, "You want the quickest and easiest way to see the Dhamma? Well, don't do anything!" The young man didn't seem pleased, because it wasn't the answer he wanted, and he obviously didn't understand its deeper meaning. However, this was an answer coming from an enlightened being with deep wisdom. His answer was for us to practice with and contemplate for ourselves.

True happiness in life starts within every one of us. The basis of this happiness is the development of confidence, belief, and respect in the great wisdom of the Buddha; that he became rightly self-awakened and passed on that perfect teaching, the Dhamma. When you practice according to these teachings, keeping the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha as your true refuge, this belief will become the compass point that guides your life in the right direction. When you hold onto this true refuge and practice according to these teachings, clear understanding of the path of morality, concentration, and wisdom will arise within your heart. By following this path you will experience true happiness.

About Ajahn Chah

Venerable Ajahn Chah (Bodhiñāṇa Thera) was born in 1918 in a farming village in Ubon Rachathani province, Northeastern Thailand. He ordained as a novice monk for a brief period in his youth, and at the age of twenty, still deeply attracted to monastic life, took full ordination. After following the traditional curriculum of Buddhist studies customary in Thailand at that time, he eventually grew disenchanted. In 1946 he abandoned his studies and took up the austere life of a wandering forest monk. Desiring to find the real essence of the Buddha's teachings, he spent the next eight years roaming throughout the country, staying in desolate jungles, caves and cremation grounds—ideal places for developing meditation.

After many arduous years of travel and practice, Ajahn Chah was invited to settle in a thick forest grove near the village of his birth,

known as a place of cobras, tigers, and ghosts. The monastery that eventually grew up there came to be known as Wat Nong Pah Pong. The conditions were difficult and the basic living requisites scarce, but Ajahn Chah's simple, direct style of teaching began to attract a large following of monks and laypeople. Despite the myriad hardships, they were willing to endure out of great loyalty for their teacher.

In 1966, Ajahn Sumedho, an American intrigued by the strict monastic discipline and way of life, came to study under Ajahn Chah. From this time on the number of Western disciples grew, and the first overseas branch monastery of Wat Nong Pah Pong was established in England in 1979. Today, Ajahn Chah's teachings and disciples are dotted across the globe, with additional monasteries in Switzerland, Italy, France, Australia, Germany, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.A.

In 1981, Ajahn Chah's health began to fail, eventually resulting in the need for an operation

on his brain. His condition became progressively worse, and he spent the last ten years of his life bedridden and unable to speak. Throughout this time he was carefully tended by his faithful disciples. On the sixteenth of January, 1992, Venerable Ajahn Chah passed away at the age of seventy-four, leaving behind a legacy that is still growing today. Headed by the King and Queen of Thailand, his funeral was attended by nearly a million people paying their last respects to a man who truly embodied the Buddha's teachings.

About Ajahn Anan

Venerable Ajahn Anan Akiñcano was born in the provincial town of Saraburi, Central Thailand, on the thirty-first of March, 1954, with the name of Anan Jan-inn. From an early age he would regularly accompany his parents to the local temple to chant and pay respects to the monks, and he recalls experiencing feelings of great ease and joy whenever looking at images of the Buddha. During his school days he was known to be well mannered and keen in his studies, and after graduation was hired as an accountant at Siam Cement Company. Though a diligent employee, he found himself increasingly drawn to Buddhist practice and began living at a nearby monastery during his hours away from work.

For the next year, while working full-time and strictly observing the eight precepts

of a lay practitioner, he was able to increase his meditation efforts and his confidence in the Buddha's teachings. After offering food to the monks each morning, he would travel to work and then return to the monastery in the evening to practice mediation. One day he had an experience of profound insight into the nature of all phenomena, followed by three days and three nights of a happiness unlike anything he had felt before. This experience removed any remaining doubts about committing his life to the Buddha's teachings and soon afterwards he decided to enter the monastic order.

On July third, 1975, Ajahn Anan took full ordination under his preceptor and teacher, the Venerable Ajahn Chah. He was given the Pāli name Akiñcano, meaning "one without worries," and spent the next four years diligently practicing meditation and developing care and attentiveness around the more routine aspects of monastic life. During this period he acted as Ajahn Chah's personal attendant, which provided him with the

opportunity to develop a close connection with his teacher. Though his meditation was difficult during these early years as a monk, in his fourth year it reached a point where it did not waver again.

After this intensive training period with Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Anan was allowed the opportunity to seek out more secluded places to further his efforts in meditation. Living in remote forests and charnel grounds, he met with various hardships both outside and within. He committed himself to this way of life for several years, growing in endurance, contending with serious bouts of malaria that took him close to death on many occasions. In 1984, he was offered a section of uninhabited land on which to build a forest monastery, and, along with two other monks and a novice, settled in the dense forest of Rayong province at what is now known as Wat Marp Jan, the Forest Monastery of the Moonlit Mountain.

Over thirty years later, Ajahn Anan's

reputation as a meditation master has grown, along with the number of monks coming to practice under him and seeking his guidance. Today, he attends to his many duties as abbot and teacher, sharing his time between monks and lay guests and looking after a growing number of branch monasteries. Though by no means comprehensive, the teachings collected in this book represent a portion of the wisdom he has shared over the years.

Glossary

Abhidhamma (Pāli). The third of the three baskets of the Tipitaka, or Pāli Canon, a systemized compendium of Buddhist philosophy and psychology.

Ajahn (Thai). Teacher; the term used as a title for senior monks (Pāli: *acariya*).

Anger. Any form of aversion or disliking (Pāli: *dosa*).

Arahant (Pāli). An enlightened being free from all greed, anger and delusion.

Anattā (Pāli). Not-self; the emptiness of all phenomena; empty of an ultimate self or soul; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Anicca (Pāli). Impermanence, instability, transience; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Ariyajana (Pāli). A Noble One; one who has realized any of the stages of enlightenment beginning with stream-entry (see *enlightenment*).

Asubha (Pāli). The unbeautiful; meditation subject on the impurity, loathsomeness and foulness of the body. This often refers to contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body or the ten cemetery contemplations.

Avijjā (Pāli). Fundamental ignorance of one's own true nature; lack of clear insight into the Four Noble Truths.

Body and mind. Physical and mental phenomena; body is identical with the first aggregate (see *five aggregates* below), and mind covers the remaining four (Pāli: *rūpa* and *nāma*).

Bhikkhu (Pāli). A Buddhist monk; a fully ordained member of the Sangha.

Buddha (Pāli). The Awakened One; the historical Buddha, Siddhattha Gotama, who taught in northern India in the sixth century B.C.

Buddho (Pāli). Awakened or enlightened; *the one who knows*; a traditional epithet of the Buddha used as a meditation word in the Thai Forest tradition.

Buddhasāsana (Pāli). The teachings of the Buddha; the Buddhist religion; Buddhism.

Craving. Desire conditioned by delusion; the second noble truth taught by the Buddha is that craving is the cause of suffering (Pāli: *taṇhā*).

Concentration. Meditative calm and stability; one-pointedness of mind (Pāli: *samādhi*).

Deva (Pāli). Celestial being. Existence in such a refined and blissful state is directly related to purity of heart through the development of virtue, samādhi and wisdom. Such a happy state of existence is, of course, impermanent.

Delusion. Fundamental ignorance; that is, ignorance of ones own true nature. Delusion can be said to imply a lack of clear insight into the Four Noble Truths. Alternatively, delusion can be described as the tendency to see the unsatisfactory as satisfactory, the impermanent as permanent, and what it not-self as self (Pāli: *avijjā* or *moha*).

Defilements / unwholesome tendencies. Mental qualities that obscure the clarity and purity of the mind. There are three basic sorts—greed, anger and delusion (Pāli: *kilesa*).

Dependent origination. Conditioned co-arising; one of the central doctrines of Buddhist teaching. The twelve-stage conditioned process that brings about suffering. Founded on the this/that principle of specific causality (when there is *this*, then *that* arises). It proceeds as follows: from ignorance arises karmic formations; from karmic formations, consciousness; from consciousness, mental and physical phenomena; from mental and physical phenomena, the six sense bases; from the six sense bases, contact; from contact, feeling; from feeling, craving; from craving, clinging; from clinging, becoming; from becoming, birth; from birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (Pāli: *paṭiccasamuppāda*).

Dhamma (Pāli). Truth, reality, nature, or the laws of nature considered as a whole. The term is often used to refer to the Buddha's teachings as well as to the truth to which they point (Sanskrit: *Dharma*).

Dukkha (Pāli). Suffering, unsatisfactoriness, discontent; literally—hard to bear. It is one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena.

Eight worldly conditions. Gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disrepute, happiness and suffering; also known as the eight worldly dhammas.

(Noble) Eightfold Path. The fourth of the noble truths taught by the Buddha; the way leading out of suffering consisting of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Enlightenment. The ultimate goal of Buddhist training and practice. Many words and phrases express this transcendent experience of awakening, for example: *vimutti*, freedom or liberation from the mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion; *Nibbāna*—literally, extinguishing the fires of greed, hatred and delusion; the deathless or unconditioned, that is, the heart is free from the conditions that bind it to conventional reality. Enlightenment is traditionally defined in terms of the abandoning of ten underlying defilements of heart and mind that fetter or bind it to the cycle of death and rebirth and the suffering experienced therein (see *saṃsāra*).

Five hindrances. Five qualities that are obstacles to clarity and concentration of the mind. They are sensual desire, ill-will, dullness, restlessness and doubt (Pāli: *nivaraṇa*).

Five aggregates. Literally, heaps. The psychophysical components that the deluded mind attaches to as a self: bodily form, feeling, memory and perception, mental formations and consciousness (Pāli: *khandha*).

Four elements. Earth, water, wind and fire—the primary qualities of matter. Earth has the characteristic of hardness, water of fluidity and cohesion, wind of motion, and fire of heat. All four are present in every material object, though in varying proportions (Pāli: *dhātu*).

Four Noble Truths. The first teaching of the Buddha—the truth of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path leading out of suffering.

Four sublime abidings. Loving-kindness (*mettā*); compassion (*karuṇā*); sympathetic joy (*muditā*), happiness at witnessing others' good fortune; equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Pāli: *brahmavihāra*).

Greed. Any sort of wanting, desire or attraction (Pāli: *lobha*).

Kamma (Pāli). Intentional action through speech, body or mind; cause leading to an effect (Sanskrit: *karma*).

Impermanent. Transient; having the nature to arise and pass away; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena (Pāli: *anicca*).

Kalyāṇajana (Pāli). A virtuous or noble person.

Kilesa (Pāli). Mental defilements, unwholesome qualities that obscure clarity and purity of mind. There are three primary roots of the mental defilements: greed, anger and delusion.

Krooba ajahn (Thai). A title of great reverence reserved for an eminent teacher or meditation master and which often implies the realization of enlightenment.

Luang Por / Pu (Thai). Venerable or reverend father/grandfather; a term of respect and affection reserved for senior and very senior monks.

Māra (Pāli). The demonic personification of the negative emotional and psychological forces that oppose the development of virtue, samādhi and wisdom.

Mettā (Pāli). loving kindness, goodwill, friendliness; one of the ten perfections (Pāli: *pārami*) and one of the four sublime abidings (Pāli: *brahmavihāra*).

Mental object. An object appearing to the mind brought about by contact at any of six sense doors. In the Thai language the word, *arom*, can also refer to an emotion or mood (Pāli: *ārammaṇa*).

Merit. The accumulation of positive kamma and the actions that contribute to this; the spiritual power of good deeds (Pāli: *puñña*).

Mindfulness. Awareness or attentiveness; the ability to keep one's attention deliberately fixed on whatever one chooses to observe (Pāli: *sati*).

Nāga (Pāli). A term commonly used to refer to strong, stately and heroic animals, such as elephants and magical serpents. In Buddhism, it is also used to refer to those who have attained the goal of the practice.

Nibbāna (Pāli). Freedom from suffering; the extinction of greed, anger and delusion; enlightenment; the ultimate goal of Buddhist training (Sanskrit: *Nirvāṇa*).

Noble ones. Those who have realized any of the stages of enlightenment beginning with stream entry (Pāli: *ariya puggala*, *ariyajana*).

Not-self. Impersonal, without individual essence; one of the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena (Pāli: *anattā*).

Pāli. The language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures, closely related to Sanskrit.

Pārami (Pāli). Spiritual development. Virtues accumulated over lifetimes manifesting as wholesome dispositions. They include: generosity, restraint, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination, kindness and equanimity.

Puthujjana (Pāli). Worldling, ordinary person; anyone still possessed of all ten fetters which bind beings to the rounds of rebirth, and thus yet to attain to the first stage of enlightenment.

Rains retreat. Every year from July to October—the time of the Asian rainy season—there is a compulsory monastic retreat. A monk's seniority is determined by the number of these retreats he has completed (Pāli: *vassa*).

Samādhi (Pāli). Meditative calm and stability; one-pointedness of mind. It refers to both the process of focusing awareness unwaveringly upon a single meditation object and the resultant state of such concentrated attention. Right concentration (or *Samma Samādhi*) is the eighth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Six sense bases. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body (including the brain) and mind.

Six sense objects. Forms, sounds, odors, flavors, physical sensations and mind—objects i.e., thoughts and moods etc.

Saññā (Pāli). Memory and perception. *Saññā* is the discriminative faculty of mind that labels and ascribes meaning to experience. However, due to the corrupting influence of ignorance, experience is always interpreted in terms of craving and attachment; that is, in terms of likes and dislikes

or desire and aversion. Consequently, one's very perception of reality is distorted from the outset and acting, speaking and thinking on the basis of these defiled memories and perceptions only reinforces their reality and entrenches the heart deeper in delusion.

Saṃsāra (Pāli). The unenlightened, unsatisfactory experience of life; the ongoing cycle of birth and death.

Saṅgha (Pāli). In general, the community of those who practice the Buddhist way; on a deeper level, anyone who has attained one of the eight stages of enlightenment.

Saṅkhārā (Pāli). Conditioned phenomena; that which is created from the coming together of various conditions. Although by definition saṅkhārā includes both physical and mental phenomena, it can also be used to refer to the fourth of the five aggregates, i.e. thoughts, moods and mental states.

Self-identity view. The view that a true self exists. This is abandoned completely only on the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment.

There are four basic types of self-identity view: that the true self is (1) identical with, (2) contained within, (3) independent of, or (4) the owner of any of the five aggregates (Pāli: *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*).

Sīla (Pāli). Virtue or morality; also refers to the specific moral precepts taken on by Buddhist laypersons, novices, monks and nuns.

Tathāgatha (Pāli). A perfect one; literally, thus gone or thus come; an epithet for the Buddha.

Three characteristics. Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. The qualities of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness apply only to those phenomena that arise from causes and conditions (Pāli: *ti-lakkhaṇa*).

Uposatha (Pāli). Observance day, corresponding with the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist lay people gather to listen to the Dhamma and to observe the eight precepts. On the new moon and full moon Uposatha days, monks assemble to recite their rules. An Uposatha hall is used to carry out these community transactions.

Vinaya (Pāli). The Buddhist monastic code of discipline; literally, leading out, because maintenance of these rules leads out of unskillful actions and unskillful states of mind; in addition it can be said to lead out of the household life and attachment to the world.

Visaṅkhāra (Pāli). That which is not conditioned and does not change.

Wat (Thai). Buddhist monastery.

Wat Nong Pah Pong (Thai). A forest monastery in northeast Thailand founded by Venerable Ajahn Chah.

Wholesome. Skillful action leading to happiness; on a higher level, action in accord with the Eightfold Path (Pāli: *kusala*).

Wisdom. Understanding of the nature of reality; insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self (Pāli: *paññā*).

All of Ajahn Anan's
English Dhamma books and CDs
are available for free distribution at
www.watmarpjan.org/en/
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